

**PITTSFIELD, MA. HIGH SCHOOL  
YEARBOOK COLLECTION 1931-1972**



PITTSFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

**Pittsfield High School, shown above, opened in the Fall of 1931. Prior to this, from 1898 thru the Spring of 1931, Pittsfield High School was located "On The Common" on Second Street.**



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## Pittsfield High School

First, here is a brief summary from the PHS Students' Guide, printed in 1926. This from Raymond Boos's copy I recently acquired:

"History of P.H.S

Pittsfield High School was first opened in November 1850, in a little wooden building on School Street in the rear of the First Baptist Church, with an enrollment of sixty-six pupils and a faculty of two teachers. In 1867 this building was rebuilt with two stories. It is still standing (1926) and is now known as the Municipal Building on Dunham Street. Three years later the town bought the old Medical College on South Street and remodeled it for use as the High School. In 1876 this building was ruined by fire, but a brick school building - the first in Pittsfield - was erected on the site of the old building the following year at a cost of \$16,000. In 1894 the enrollment of the school did not exceed two hundred pupils and the faculty consisted of seven teachers, among them Mr. W.D. Goodwin, vice principal at the present time (1926). In 1895 the high school building was again destroyed by fire, immediately work was begun on a new one and within two years the present central building was opened at a cost of \$25,000. During the two years that the new high school was being built sessions were held in the West Block on West Street.

The enrollment of the school in 1914 exceeded the capacity of the high school building so in the same year the Commercial Department was transferred to the Franklin F. Read School on Fenn Street which had been erected in 1884.

Pittsfield High School has had fourteen principals since it was organized. The present principal, Mr. Roy M. Strout, was engaged as Headmaster in 1921. P.H.S. in its seventy-sixth year, has an enrollment of eight-hundred-eighty-six pupils and a faculty of forty teachers."

I will scan this booklet at a later date. It is fascinating!

## Anecdotal Chronology

**1792:** Latin Grammar School founded. In 1635 the Massachusetts Bay Colony mandated that a Latin Grammar School must be established in every town whose population had reached 100 or more families. By at least 1781 Pittsfield had reached that number. The town did not comply with that law until 1792 when it established a public Latin Grammar School on the first floor of the newly constructed town house, the community's first town hall. Town meetings were held on the second floor. The two-story structure was located between the present St. Stephen's Church (circa 1889) and what is now called The Old Town Hall (circa 1832), upon what is now Allen Street between Park Place and School Street.

**1824:** Latin Grammar School dissolved. In this year the town voted that funds should be appropriated in the several school districts for public grammar schools there, instead of continuing support for the public Latin Grammar School. More rigorous than the curriculum of the district grammar schools, the curriculum of the Latin Grammar School was sufficient preparation for a higher education. It was customary at this time to pay back to parents the taxes paid by them for schooling, to be expended at their discretion for tuition in the school

of their choice. With the Pittsfield Latin Grammar School dissolved, the private Pittsfield Academy took over the schoolroom on the first floor of the first town hall. The Pittsfield Academy was dissolved in 1832 when the first town hall was moved to make room for the first St. Stephen's Church. Remodeled, the first town hall became a residence on the east corner of Bartlett and East Streets.

**1844:** Town meeting votes to establish its first high school in compliance with 1827 state mandate.

**May 9, 1849:** Site purchased for first Pittsfield High School for \$459. Located in the northeast corner of the old burial ground, which at that time included part of the Common, the high school site was that which is presently occupied by City Hall (the "old" post office, circa 1911). Later, access roads would be opened from the site to North and East Streets, the former to be called School Street. The latter is presumed to be what is now Wendell Avenue Extension.

**November 1850:** Pittsfield High School opens in a new, three-room wood building. The enrollment was 66 pupils and two teachers. An 1861 school report stated that "all the school houses in the town, 20 in number, including the high school, have been built by the town within the past 12 years at an expense of a little short of \$30,000." In the designation of the time, which meant that two or more Howard brothers were attending the high school at the same time, Pittsfield High School student "Howard 2nd" described the first PHS as follows: "It is nearly surrounded with churches of almost every denomination. It faces the west and is painted white. It has two entries, one for the girls and one for the boys. The boys' is in front of the schoolhouse, and the girls' at the back part. Besides these there are three more rooms, viz., two recitation rooms and one large room where all the scholars that are not reciting are assembled. The large room is Gothic shaped overhead. The benches are made of cherry, and there is not a nail used in putting them together and are supported by cast iron frames. To sit in are chairs fastened onto iron stools that are screwed in the floor."

**1867:** School Street PHS reconstructed to a height of two stories.

**1870:** Medical College building on South Street becomes second home to Pittsfield High School. In debt and with declining enrollment, the Medical College was dissolved in 1870 and sold to the town for \$8,500. The structure was remodeled at an expense of \$7,500 for use as a high and grammar school. The Medical College was situated on what is now Veterans' Memorial Park, on South Street, where the war monument now stands.

**April 1876:** South Street PHS destroyed by fire.

**1876:** New high school of brick constructed on South Street site. The school was rebuilt at a cost of \$16,000. The enrollment was 65 pupils and three teachers. The average daily attendance first reached 100 in 1844, and 200 in 1894. At one time, while the South Street PHS was being enlarged, the school met for a few months in an old theater connected with the old Burbank Hotel, located near Union Station (now demolished, it stood until a few years ago off New West Street). Historians recount that the need for a high school was the subject of serious debate, and that the small graduating classes of 1875 and 1878 being comprised entirely of girls did not aid the cause of the high school.

**March 6, 1895:** PHS building on South Street completely destroyed by fire of undetermined cause. All that was salvaged was a piano, a chair and a teacher's desk.

**1895:** PHS quartered on upper floors of new West Block on west corner of Clapp Avenue and West Street.

**June 1895:** Site purchased for proposed new high school. Located between the Common and Second Street, it was purchased for \$9,500.

**1895:** Appropriation made by city council for new high school on the Common.

**Fall 1897:** PHS returned temporarily to its first home on School Street. In the interim, this facility had served as home to the Center Grammar School. At a later date to make way for a post office, the building would be moved to Dunham Street to serve as a municipal building, there even later to be demolished to make way for the present police station.

**1898:** PHS moves into new building on the Common, constructed at a cost of \$170,000. At first able to accommodate schools of lower grades as well as the high school, the high school enrollment rose so rapidly that it soon monopolized and overflowed its quarters. Even though enrollment was only 247 in 1899, by the fall of 1911 the high school population was 705. The Commercial Department was transferred to the former Read School (now Mt. Carmel) in 1912, only temporarily relieving the high school, whose enrollment passed 900 in 1914.

**1913:** Comprehensive high school proposed by school authorities.

**1921:** Mayor forms committee to study high school overcrowding after more than 10 years of this problem. In its 1922 report the committee recommended that a new school should be constructed on a different site.

**1925:** High school building commission appointed. This commission, three successive high school principals and the school committee made clear the need for a new high school rather than additions to the existing high school. Yet the controversy and indecision dragged on.

**1928:** School committee votes to inaugurate double sessions at PHS and Read Annex.

**August 1928:** Board of aldermen votes to take by eminent domain the Plunkett-Hull-Kellogg property on the west corner of East Street and Appleton Avenue for site of new PHS. Although the Registry of Deeds (Book 439, Pages 137,8) records the purchase price as \$128,000, several later *Eagle* reports state that \$196,000 was eventually paid for the three lots. Prior to this date every available site in the heart of the city was considered.

**March 28, 1930:** Cornerstone of East Street Pittsfield High School laid. (See excerpt from the *Eagle* article below)

Link to the full Berkshire Eagle coverage - [here](#)

**September 9, 1931:** East Street PHS opens to 1,450 students. Appropriation: \$1.29 million. (see *Eagle* articles at the end of this page)

**1941:** Garage on East Street (former Berkshire Buick and previously a Packard dealership) converted to vocational shop annex.



**1944:** School system report calls attention to high birth rates of 1942 and 1943. From 1931 to 1940 the number of births per year had been less than 840. In 1941 the number was 905, and in 1942 and 1943 it was 1,031 and 1,042.

**1945:** Committee on high school gymnasium appointed by mayor. Soon after the initial occupancy, the facilities for physical education, both inside and outside, were recognized as inadequate. The gymnasium committee investigated a number of proposals. Baffled by the complicated roof structure of the gymnasium and confused by the proliferation of proposals for enlargement, efforts to solve the school's lack of adequate physical education facilities lapsed into inactivity by the end of 1946.

**1947:** Two Quonset huts installed at rear of east wing to provide additional shop space.

**1948:** Bruhn property abutting south property line of high school acquired by city. The late Donald B. Miller, then publisher of the *Eagle*, purchased the property from Mrs. E. C. Bruhn in late 1947 for \$37,000. Two months later he sold it to the city for the same price. The city rented the apartments in the Bruhn house until 1953 when it and an abandoned carriage house were razed to provide PHS with more outside physical education space. The Bruhn house would be the fourth demolition of old homes for the PHS site. Removed earlier from the site were the Dr. Brace W. Paddock House (circa 1820) and Thomas F. Plunkett House (circa 1790) on East Street, and the James W. Hull House on Appleton Avenue. It was the Plunkett House which had been called the "Longfellow House." It was there the poet wrote the poem "The Old Clock on the Stairs" which immortalized the house's stairway. At that time, 1845, he was a guest of his wife's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Appleton of Boston, who were visiting Mrs. Appleton's parents here for the summer.

**1948:** School system analysis impending overcrowding alerts community to growing school building problems and leads to Engelhardt survey. The number of births in 1947 was 1,341. It would remain close to this until 1964.

**January 12, 1949:** Engelhardt report issued—declares PHS incapable of meeting future demands and cautions against adding to PHS. Recommends new comprehensive high school on new site, built in two stages, with total capacity of 2,000 scheduled for completion in 1958 at which time PHS would be converted to a junior high and administrative offices.

**May 23, 1949:** Capital Outlay Committee rejects proposal for new high school and recommends expenditure of \$750,000 for addition to PHS to accommodate enrollment of approximately 2,000.

**1950:** PHS vocational shops relieved by transfer of General Vocational Department.

**August 1954:** School system report issued reviewing extensive needs of PHS; invites community study of four proposals:

1. Extend east and west wings of PHS.
2. Extend east and west wings and erect nearby vocational shop building.
3. Build second comprehensive high school of 1,300 capacity on new site, estimated cost \$3 million, resulting in two comprehensive high schools.
4. Build new comprehensive high school of capacity 2,500 on new site.

Report concluded that proposal (3) was “educationally advantageous” because of the inadequate PHS site or exceptionally large capacity associated with the other three proposals.

**February 2, 1955:** *Berkshire Eagle* editorial urges rehabilitation of old PHS (on Common) as a “classical” high school.

**October 8, 1955:** Capital Outlay Committee recommends rehabilitation of old PHS as annex to East Street PHS; defers decision on new vocational facilities and expansion of PHS gym and cafeteria.

**November 21, 1957:** Capital Outlay Committee reviews PHS problems; suggests four more proposals.

**September 1960:** The Committee on High School Building Needs of the Pittsfield Citizens Council for Public Schools issues report—recommends that new building of 900 capacity be erected on existing site, connected by corridors to PHS. Also recommended are expansion of existing gym and cafeteria, and acquisition of adjacent land. Projected cost: \$2.8 million. Two members of the committee issue minority report recommending construction of 900-capacity vocational school on new site.

**January 15, 1962:** Pittsfield Vocational Advisory Committee votes to support enlarged PHS with new adjacent vocational building.

**March 16, 1962:** School Space Needs Committee of Pittsfield School Committee issues report considering three options—vigorously defends one of those: new comprehensive high school of 1,300 capacity on new site including entire vocational high school. Projected cost: \$3.6 million.

**August 1962:** Consultants Candeub, Fleissig and Associates, in planning memorandum, recommend new high school of 1,300 capacity on new site. In September of 1962 they estimate cost of such a facility to be \$3 million.

**September 1962:** All grade 10 commercial and general students (265) transferred to newly opened Crosby Junior High. Remaining 1,918 students quartered at PHS. (Capacity at that time given as 1,600. Four months later, state and school officials determine that 1,300 is a more realistic figure.) Exploration begun for plans to house an additional 260 students expected in September 1963.

**December 1962:** Capital Outlay Committee recommends new technical-vocational high school of 1,000 capacity on new site. Estimated cost: \$2.5 million.

**January 9, 1963:** *Berkshire Eagle* editorial urges consideration of new non-comprehensive school on new site, and converting of PHS to college preparatory high school.

**February 13, 1963:** School Department issues a report treating alternatives in depth—endorses 1,300-capacity comprehensive high school on new site.

**March 19, 1963:** School Committee endorses new 1,400-capacity comprehensive high school.

**December 12, 1963:** School Committee votes “to reconsider its vote of last spring and go on record as favoring the construction of a new vocational and technical high school for Pittsfield.”

**February 25, 1964:** School Committee reverses itself again. In a 52-word motion, word for word identical to the one of March 19, 1963, School Committee endorses construction of new 1,400-capacity comprehensive high school, by a vote of 5 to 3.

**March 27, 1964:** Capital Outlay Committee recommends new comprehensive high school of 1,000 capacity; projected cost: \$2 million.

**April 14, 1964:** On recommendation of mayor, city council establishes High School Commission to make comprehensive study of the problem.

**July 9, 1964:** High School Commission issues report calling for new comprehensive high school, capacity 1,250 on new site; projected cost: \$3.25 million. Commission recommends building it on 36 acres in Springside Park, a location later ruled out because of opposition from the protectors of parkland.

**December 14, 1965:** City Council, after prodding from mayor to make a decision, votes 9-2 to build the new high school on 50 acres on the south-east corner of Valentine Road and Lakeway Drive, after more than a year of contemplation and controversy regarding proposed sites throughout the entire city. Property cost: \$98,500.

**July 19, 1966:** Council unanimously approves mayor's request for a \$6,455,000 high school bond issue.

**September 7, 1966:** An overcrowded Pittsfield High goes on double sessions.

**October 4, 1967:** Some 70 people attend groundbreaking ceremonies for the new school. Target date for completion is the fall of 1968.

**July 10, 1968:** Opening date of the new school is pushed back to February 3, 1969.

**September 3, 1969:** Taconic High School opens its doors to students for the first time. Total building appropriation: \$6,788,500. In addition to the appropriations, the succeeding school department budgets would contain funds to provide equipment and furnishings which the High School Commission could not with its funding. While the Taconic High construction was proceeding, no plans were developed or considered to bring the obsolescent East Street PHS up to contemporary educational and utilitarian standards.

**August 1970:** School Building Needs Commission (SBNC) established. Commission spends first two months visiting city's 25 schools as initial step in assessment of their educational and utilitarian merit.

**December 1971:** SBNC requests \$75,000 for plans, schematics and cost analysis of various uses of five secondary schools.

**July 1972:** PHS's three giant coal-fired boilers converted to oil-fired.

**December 1972:** SBNC issues 800-page report "A Study in Contrasts," a research, reference and recommendations document outlining a 20-year plan to eliminate obsolescence, overcrowding and other problems preventing the attainment of equal educational opportunity for all city children. The report details the PHS obsolescence, disrepair, overcrowding, and lack of adequate ancillary facilities, and reaffirms need for \$75,000 to hire trained professionals to analyze the needs and best use of the city's five public secondary schools.

**January 23, 1973:** City Council approves expenditure of \$75,000 for secondary school study.

**May 9, 1973:** After interviewing 26 applicant architectural firms, Earl R. Flansburgh and Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts, is selected for approximately \$70,000 to perform the schematic design work on the modernization of the secondary schools. A tight time schedule is anticipated because there have been rumbles from Boston that the city's current entitlement of 65% reimbursement for any forthcoming school projects could be reduced to 40% by January 1974. The School Building Assistance Bureau has warned that no reimbursement of any amount will be available for PHS renovated as a senior high school because of a severely limited site.

**October 1973:** SBNC recommends a new PHS on a new site with East Street PHS converted to a middle school.

**April 1974:** With no explanation, School Building Assistance Bureau reverses its previous stand on reimbursement for PHS. It now states that it will support a PHS senior high renovation with modest landtaking. Flansburgh must redo all cost analyses. After much bartering, the School Building Assistance Bureau will later require only the taking of the gas station at the corner of East and Appleton. After Flansburgh's new cost analysis, SBNC continues to favor new high school on new site. Lacking enough support on School Committee and City Council, where a 2/3 majority is needed, the Commission will later petition mayor and City Council for renovation funds for PHS.

**December 23, 1974:** SBNC requests \$9.6 million to modernize PHS. Needing eight votes, the request fails by one vote. Councilmen voting in minority ask for arbitrary 10% cut. Architects and Commission review initial proposal.

**January 14, 1975:** SBNC and architect appear before City Council to state that they believe it possible to modernize PHS for \$8.6 million. During the re-evaluation period the architects discovered that the auditorium had been constructed larger than shown on blueprints. This allowed the elimination of a new music wing, and its relocation to existing building. The remainder of the 10% reduction was found in a paper cut of the contingency fund. City Council approved \$8,629,000 on this date.

**January 1975:** Board of Education places moratorium on reimbursements for new school projects. It later approves the PHS project, one of the last to be funded at 65%.

**Summer 1975:** Working against a time schedule that will allow the successful contractor to break ground at summer's end, the architect produces working drawings in an unprecedented seven weeks.

**September 1975:** Groundbreaking by general contractor, David J. Tierney, Jr., Inc. PHS has been emptied during summer. PHS students spend 1975-76 academic year in seven downtown buildings—old Second Street PHS, Jewish Community Center, Pittsfield Girls' Club, top floor of Plunkett Elementary School, Madonna Hall, Pittsfield Boys' Club, and the PHS Annex on Appleton Avenue.

**September 1976:** With the existing building completely renovated, PHS students return to East Street PHS. The additions will be finished and occupied by early 1977.

**April 24, 1977:** Dedication of modernized PHS facility. Although not quite complete, the project is about six months ahead of schedule.



**June 17, 1979:** The Pittsfield High School Student Council president convinces the school committee to allow the PHS graduation ceremony to be held at Tanglewood. More than 3,600 relatives and friends attend the program and start a new tradition.

**September 9, 1981:** Proposition 2 1/2 takes its toll as five schools close; the teaching staff is reduced by 160 and, in consolidation, Pittsfield High and Taconic welcome their first ninth grade classes.

**February 1983:** As the final phase of Proposition 2 1/2 takes effect and enrollment declines, the schools face 60 more layoffs.

**April 4, 1986:** Pittsfield High students stage a walkout over disciplinary matters relating to public displays of affection (PDAs). Calmer times soon prevail.

**February 1995:** A large oil spill in a rear courtyard forces the closing of PHS for several days during the clean up.

**September 1995:** The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) gives PHS high marks in its decennial evaluation.

**September 2005:** The NEASC evaluation is again very positive, but notes the deteriorating physical facilities of the PHS campus.

**December 2005:** A mercury spill in the science area causes Pittsfield High to close again for several days, forcing double sessions at Taconic High School.